NUMB. XCVIII.

The SPECTATOR.

——Tanta eſt quærendi cura decoris. Juv.

Friday, June 22. 1711.

THERE is not ſo variable a thing in Nature as a Lady's Head-dreſs: Within my own Memory I have known it riſe and fall above thirty Degrees. About ten Years ago it ſhot up to a very great Height, inſomuch that the Female Part of our Species were taller than the Men. The Women were of late an enormous Stature, that *we appeared as Graſſhoppers before them:* At preſent the whole Sex is in a manner dwarfed and ſhrunk into a Race of Beauties that ſeems almoſt another Species. I remember ſeveral Ladies, who were once very near ſeven Foot high, that at preſent want ſome Inches of five: How they came to be thus curtailed I cannot learn; whether the whole Sex be at preſent under any Pennance which we know nothing of, or whether they have caſt their Head-dreſſes in order to ſurprize us with ſomething in that Kind which ſhall be entirely new; or whether ſome of the talleſt of the Sex, being too cunning for the reſt, have contrived this Method to make themſelves appear graceable, is ſtill a Secret; tho' I find moſt are of Opinion, they are at preſent like Trees new lopped and pruned, that will certainly ſprout up and flouriſh with greater Heads than before. For my own Part, as I do not love to be inſulted by Women who are taller than my ſelf, I admire the Sex much more in their preſent Humiliation, which has reduced them to their natural Dimenſions, than when they had extended their Perſons, and lengthened themſelves out into formidable and gigantick Figures. I am not for adding to the beautiful Edifices of Nature, nor for raiſing any whimſical Superſtructure upon her Plans; I muſt therefore repeat it, that I am highly pleaſed with the Coiffure now in Faſhion; and think it ſhews the good Senſe which at preſent very much reigns among the valuable Part of the Sex. One may obſerve, that Women in all Ages have taken more Pains than Men to adorn the Outſide of their Heads; and indeed I very much admire, that thoſe Female Architects who raiſe ſuch wonderful Structures out of Ribbands, Lace and Wire, have not been recorded for their reſpective Inventions. It is certain there has been as many Orders in theſe Kinds of Building, as in thoſe which have been made of Marble: Sometimes they riſe in the Shape of a Pyramid, ſometimes like a Tower, and ſometimes like a Steeple. In *Juvenal*'s Time the Building grew by ſeveral Orders and Stories, as he has very humorouſly deſcribed it.

Tot premit ordinibus, tot adhuc compagibus altum
Ædificat caput: Andromachen à fronte videbis;
Poſt minor eſt: Aliam credas. Juv.

But I do not remember, in any Part of my Reading, that the Head-dreſs aſpired to ſo great an Extravagance as in the fourteenth Century; when it was built up in a couple of Cones or Spires, which ſtood ſo exceſſively high on each Side of the Head, that a Woman who was but a *Pigmie* without her Head-dreſs, appeared like a *Coloſſus* upon putting it on. Monſieur *Paradin* ſays, 'That theſe old faſhioned 'Fontanges roſe an Ell above the Head; that they 'were pointed like Steeples, and had long looſe 'Pieces of Crape faſtened to the Tops of them, 'which were curiouſly fringed and hung down 'their Backs like Streamers.

The Women might poſſibly have carried this Gothick Building much higher, had not a famous Monk, *Thomas Conelte* by Name, attacked it with great Zeal and Reſolution. This holy Man travelled from Place to Place to preach down this monſtrous Commode; and ſucceeded ſo well in it, that as the Magicians ſacrificed their Books to the Flames upon the preaching of an Apoſtle, many of the Women threw down their Head-dreſſes in the Middle of his Sermon, and made a Bonfire of them within Sight of the Pulpit. He was ſo renowned, as well for the Sanctity of his Life as his Manner of preaching, that he had often a Congregation of twenty thouſand People; the Men placing themſelves on the one Side of his Pulpit and the Women on the other, that appeared (to uſe the Similitude of an ingenious Writer) like a Forreſt of Cedars with their Heads reaching to the Clouds.

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He ſo warmed and animated the People againſt this monſtrous Ornament, that it lay under a kind of Perſecution; and whenever it appeared in Publick was pelted down by the Rabble, who flung Stones at the Perſons that wore it. But notwithſtanding this Prodigy vaniſhed while the Preacher was among them, it began to appear again ſome Months after his Departure, or, to tell it in Monſieur *Paradin*'s own Words, 'The Women that, like Snails in a Fright, 'had drawn in their Horns, ſhot them out again 'as ſoon as the Danger was over.' This Extravagance of the Womens Head-dreſſes in that Age, is taken Notice of by Monſieur *Argentré* in his Hiſtory of *Bretagne*, and by other Hiſtorians as well as the Perſon I have here quoted.

It is uſually obſerved, That a good Reign is the only proper Time for the making of Laws againſt the Exorbitance of Power: In the ſame Manner an exceſſive Head-dreſs may be attacked the moſt effectually when the Faſhion is againſt it. I do therefore recommend this Paper to my female Readers by way of Prevention.

I would deſire the fair Sex to conſider, how impoſſible it is for them to add any thing that can be ornamental to what is already the Maſterpiece of Nature. The Head has the moſt beautiful Appearance, as well as the higheſt Station, in a humane Figure. Nature has laid out all her Art in beautifying the Face: She has touched it with Vermillion, planted in it a double Row of Ivory, made it the Seat of Smiles and Bluſhes, lighted it up and enlivened it with the Brightneſs of the Eyes, hung it on each Side with curious Organs of Senſe, given it Airs and Graces that cannot be deſcribed, and ſurrounded it with ſuch a flowing Shade of Hair as ſets all its Beauties in the moſt agreeable Light: In ſhort, ſhe ſeems to have deſigned the Head as the Cupola to the moſt glorious of her Works; and when we load it with ſuch a Pile of ſupernumerary Ornaments, we deſtroy the Symmetry of the humane Figure, and fooliſhly contrive to call off the Eye from great and real Beauties, to childiſh Gew-gaws, Ribbands, and Bone-lace.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

By Her Majeſty's Company of Comedians.

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